Metropolitan Hilarion's message to participants in theological talks between Russian Orthodox Church and Evangelical Church in Germany

On December 9, 2012, representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Evangelical Church in Germany began theological talks in Rostov-on-Don as a continuation of the theological dialogue initiated over 50 years ago. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, sent the following message to the participants in the theological talks:

Dear Brother in Christ, Bishop Martin Schindehutte,

Your Eminence, Metropolitan Mercury,

Dear Participants in the theological talks between the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Russian Orthodox Church:

I cordially greet you all as you have gathered for a significant event – the resumption of theological talks between our two Churches.

Our dialogue is over 50 years old. During this time, relations between our Churches have become deeper. We have come to a better knowledge of each other and, most importantly, we have preserved mutual trust, which has been formed for decades and have helped us to overcome some difficulties in mutual understanding and to resume our talks. I am confident that today our two Churches are able to openly discuss even painful issues for mutual benefit and for the good of the entire Christian community.

The theme of the forthcoming talks, 'Christian Churches in a Multicultural Society', seems to reflect the

Christian vision of today's world in its multicultural, multireligious and multiconfessional shape.

As is known, the term 'multiculturalism' has many interpretations, while its theory and practice vary from state to state. At the same time, there are opinions that 'multiculturalism' is out of date, that it has failed to justify hopes pinned on it and that the time has come to develop theories of 'multiculturalism', 'transculturalism' and the like.

I should think we in our discussions should not become hostages to alien theories. One thing is clear. It is that 'multiculturalism', globalization and the ensuing set of philosophical and political ideas is an attempt to respond to the very important challenge of today, namely, how to elaborate the principles of common existence and cooperation among diverse cultures within one space. It is on the fulfilment of this task that the survival of our civilization depends.

In elaborating these principles, Christians have a most important role to play. In contact with other religious traditions and cultures, Christians show respect for their bearers and cooperate with them thus contributing to peace and stability in society. Then a number of questions arise. How to preserve our Christian identity in this situation? How to avoid losing our self-awareness as 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' (Mt. 5:13-14)? How to develop and reinforce Christian values without yielding to the temptation to melt down in the by-products of tolerance and political correctness, which sometimes see the true freedom of man in the refusal to show any 'otherness' including religious affiliation? Hence are the bans not only on the wearing of hijabs but also on the open wearing of baptismal crosses, on the presence of crucifixes in public places and the suppression of Christian holidays, that is to say, the imposition of equality in 'non-religiosity' at the expense of religiosity.

In this alarming situation, the task of our dialogue appears to lie in the following: using the age-old experience of co-existence and interaction of cultures accumulated by our two countries, we should find such a form of our participation in global processes, political, economic, ecological and social, as to give Christians a chance to preserve the gospel's norm of the faith; and not only to preserve it but also to be active engaged in bearing 'witness of the Light, that all through Him might believe' (Jn. 1:7). For however complicated the uniting and dividing processes may be in countries and communities, a

Christian has always had that which does not depend on the changing external world and that which constitutes the basis of his life, which is Christ, the faith and the Church, whose task lies first of all in the moral transformation of the human being and the world. This is precisely the role the Christian Churches are to play in the processes of global development and dialogue of cultures.

Along with greetings, I would like to express hope for further deepening and development of relations between our two Churches and nations. It is not for nothing that the book prepared by Protestants in Germany and Orthodox people in Russia and devoted to our meetings in history and to our common efforts in the field of theology, education and social work has been entitled ‘To Hear and See Each Other’. These significant words reflect both our past experience of relations and the main theme of our today’s dialogue.

I am confident that our common efforts will always bring the desired good fruit.

+ Hilarion

Metropolitan of Volokolamsk

Chairman

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